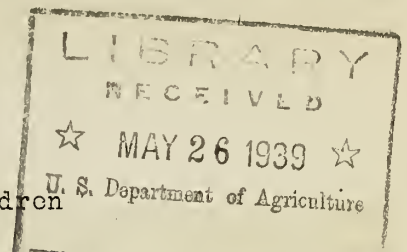


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Toward Better Fitting Clothes for Children



A radio conversation between Miss Ruth Van Deman and Miss Ruth O'Brien, Bureau of Home Economics, Mr. Harold W. Brightman, Chairman of the National Consumer-Retailer Council, and Mrs. Paul E. Howe, representing the American Home Economics Association, broadcast Thursday, April 27, 1939, from Radio City, New York City, in the Department of Agriculture period of the National Farm and Home program, by the National Broadcasting Company and a network of 104 associate radio stations.

ANNOUNCER:

Here we are in Radio City in New York. And here with us ready to continue the Farm and Home program is Miss Ruth Van Deman, of the Bureau of Home Economics of the United States Department of Agriculture---the same Miss Van Deman, I think it is, you're accustomed to hearing every Thursday from Washington.

RUTH VAN DEMAN:

Entirely the same, Mr. Browning. Twenty-four hours in New York City haven't changed me a bit. And I'm quite sure Miss O'Brien here is the same Ruth O'Brien who heads our textile and clothing work in the Bureau of Home Economics. How about it?

RUTH O'BRIEN:

I surely am. We're just New Yorkers for the day---up here for a meeting sponsored by the American Standards Association---a meeting looking toward a new method of sizing children's clothes so they'll come nearer fitting real live American youngsters.

VAN DEMAN:

And I might add, a meeting called to give manufacturers, and retailers, and consumers, a chance to hear the results of the child measurement study that Miss O'Brien has been steering for the last two years or so - - -

Now introducing the others with us here today --- Mrs. Paul Howe, this lady on my left, was at the conference as one of the representatives of the American Home Economics Association --- and also as a mother who's had her troubles in buying clothes to fit daughters of her own.

And with us here, to give a retailer's slant on this question of sizes in children's clothes, is Mr. Harold W. Brightman, Chairman of the National Consumer-Retailer Council. Mr. Brightman, from the way I've heard you speak out I know you have ideas on the subject.

HAROLD W. BRIGHTMAN:

Yes, I have very decided ideas on this subject. The way boys' and girls' ready-made clothes are marked now means millions of dollars loss every year to retail stores. By a very conservative estimate, I'd say that at least 10 million dollars worth of children's clothing is returned to department stores every year because of wrong size or lack of size standardization.

(over)

That's not counting in the specialty shops. With them included the figure would probably be nearer 13 or 14 million.

But, Mrs. Howe, I didn't mean to jump in here and put our money loss ahead of what I know the customer suffers in inconvenience and waste of time in shopping - - -

MRS. PAUL E. HOWE:

I'm glad, Mr. Brightman, you understand why the customer has just cause for complaint. We don't want to return goods any more than the store wants goods returned.

BRIGHTMAN:

Yes, I think we may just as well be realistic about this.

HOWE:

We're realists too. We know that the customer has to pay a good share of this loss on returned goods. So that's why the American Home Economics Association asked the American Standards Association to see what could be done about getting a new system of sizing children's clothes.

BRIGHTMAN:

When I heard of that I was elated.

VAN DEMAN:

Quite frankly I don't see why manufacturers of patterns and garments ever thought age was a sensible basis on which to try to standardize children's clothes. Look at the youngsters in any schoolroom---or over in the neighbor's yard---wherever there's a group of children the same age.

HOWE:

You're certainly right, Miss Van Deman. There's generally a slim Jim and a fatty - - -

VAN DEMAN:

And an airy, fairy Lillian type---

O'BRIEN:

And a sturdy, stocky Jane.

HOWE:

My own daughters were the tall slender type from the time they were in rompers.

O'BRIEN:

Well, I suppose I might as well admit to having been a plump O'Brien from the start.

VAN DEMAN:

I guess I'd have fallen somewhere in between you two. We couldn't any more have worn the same size dress when we were 10 years old than we could now.

BRIGHTMAN:

There's no rhyme or reason to this system of age markings on children's clothes. It's just one of those things that "grewed" like Topsy.

Miss O'Brien, I think we must have been waiting for you to come along and measure 150,000 children and give us real figures to go on.

O'BRIEN:

Well, it's said, that science is just common sense organized. And our measurements on these thousands of children have proved what observing persons have known for a long time---that age is the worst possible basis for sizing children's garments.

BRIGHTMAN:

But the new plan you're proposing, it's a big step forward. We may find it a good idea to throw over these age markings and use a two-dimensional system---based on height and breadth.

O'BRIEN:

Again that's just common sense. The difference is that now we have reliable figures to back us up and guide us.

Our figures show that if you know how tall a child is and how large around at one or two strategic points, then you can estimate the rest of the body well enough to make a good fitting garment. We're proposing three possible combinations--- either hip or chest measure, combined with height. Or, height and weight.

BRIGHTMAN:

Height and hip measure. Yes, some boys' clothes are sized that way now.

O'BRIEN:

Our statistician, Mr. Gershick, leans toward the plan using hip measure and height.

Suppose, for instance, you wanted to buy a dress to fit a little girl 45 inches tall and 23 inches around the hips, you'd take those two measurements to the store and ask for a dress of the right size for that combination. That is, if and when, the trade uses these body measurements we've collected.

BRIGHTMAN:

Certainly, we understand, Miss O'Brien, the Bureau of Home Economics is merely providing the body measurements on these 150,000 children. We're not expecting you to do the job of sizing the garments. That's largely up to the manufacturers.

O'BRIEN:

Not entirely. As it showed yesterday at the conference, you retailers will have to work very closely with the manufacturers. You both will have to decide which of the three plans will work out most satisfactorily. We took 36 measures of each child you remember. We can furnish the complete figures for any one of these combinations for children all the way from 4 years old to 17.

BRIGHTMAN:

And as I remember it, this is a cross section of young America, from coast-to-coast.

O'BRIEN:

Yes, fifteen States and the District of Columbia cooperated with us. This has been a cooperative project from start to finish. The funds for measuring the children came from the Works Progress Administration. The National Youth Administration provided some of the workers. People from the colleges, universities, and other educational institutions in the States took charge locally. Parents and schools gave us permission to measure their children. And now the American Standards Association, under the direction of Dr. P. G. Agnew, their secretary, is bringing the results to the attention of manufacturers, retailers, and other interested groups.

HOWE:

The American Home Economics Association would like to see this adopted as an American Standard for sizing children's clothes --- And we'd like to have you go on and do the same for women.

BRIGHTMAN:

I'm sure the retailers would welcome that too. The size situation on women's clothes is also greatly confused and the source of enormous economic loss. I don't know that anybody's ever tried to estimate how great the loss is through returns and alterations. - - -

HOWE:

Major operations, they often are.

BRIGHTMAN:

And very expensive "operations". And often resulting in that other thing a merchant doesn't like---loss of customer good will when the "operation" isn't successful.

But, Miss O'Brien, going back to the new plan you propose for sizes of children's clothes, I think the Bureau of Home Economics is very much to be congratulated on what you've done in furnishing these measurements of children. You're giving us the first real facts we've ever had to go on---as a basis for sizing garments for any civilian group.

O'BRIEN:

It's never safe to claim a first.

BRIGHTMAN:

I insist you're doing a pioneer job. And I can say this because I'm entirely outside the Government. I had no part in this project.

O'BRIEN:

It's all due to cooperation.

BRIGHTMAN:

But you were the mainspring. If it hadn't been for your patience and persistence - - -

O'BRIEN:

But we couldn't have got anywhere without the help of the people in the States---

VAN DEMAN:

Mr. Brightman, Mrs. Howe and I are listening to you. Modestly, you know, sometimes makes deaf ears.

But before we sign off I wonder if some of the others listening might not like to express their opinion on this question of sizes for children's clothes.

BRIGHTMAN:

If they did, that would be very helpful to us.

VAN DEMAN:

Well, Farm and Home Friends, we're still getting your letters about the better-fitting cotton stockings that Miss O'Brien told us about several weeks ago on this program. We've passed those opinions on to the manufacturers and the merchants, keeping your names confidential of course. We'd like to do the same on the children's clothes if you have time to write us. It takes a while to get some of these new practices adopted. But opinions of consumers do have weight. So if you're interested write us a letter or a card to the Bureau of Home Economics, Department of Agriculture, Washington, D. C.

And now Mrs. Howe, and Mr. Brightman, we certainly appreciate your joining with us today---From the opinions you've expressed it would seem that we're on our way toward better fitting clothes for children.

And Mr. Browning, I expect the people in Washington are wondering whether we're trying to steal the show and set up permanent headquarters for the Farm and Home program in New York.

ANNOUNCER:

No, Miss Van Deman, we'll fix that in just a minute. But first I want to repeat that suggestion you made a moment ago. If any one would like to register an opinion on sizes of children's clothes, whether they'd like to see a new plan adopted, just write to Miss Ruth O'Brien or Miss Ruth Van Deman, at the Bureau of Home Economics, Department of Agriculture, Washington, D. C.

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